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Special to The New York Times

KABUL, Afghanistan, Jan. 18 — In the last seven years, a small city of concrete apartment buildings and shops has risen on the outskirts of Kabul, not far from the airport.

It is the Soviet district, a miniature Moscow that is the center of a separate and reclusive world occupied by the thousands of Soviet civilians who live and work here.

Although Russians posted anywhere overseas as diplomats, advisers and journalists have a tendency to keep to themselves, partly by instinct and partly by instruction from Moscow, the practice has been reinforced in Afghanistan because of security concerns.

"They're exceedingly nervous," a Western diplomat said. "The Afghans don't like Russians, czarist or Soviet."

See Themselves as Unwelcome

Although other diplomats quarreled with the generalization, it was clear during a five-day visit to Afghanistan, most of which was spent in Kabul, that the Soviet contingent, military and civilian, considers itself unwelcome among the Afghan population.

Western analysts said there were about 120,000 Soviet troops in Afghanistan, a number that has varied little since the Soviet intervention against the Afghan guerrillas began in 1979. Afghan and Soviet officials refer to the military presence as the "Soviet limited contingent," and some Soviet press dispatches carry the dateline, "With the Soviet Limited Contingent in Afghanistan."

Western diplomats said that in addition to the troops, who are spread around bases throughout the country, there are about 9,000 Soviet civilian advisers in Kabul.

The threat, according to Kabul residents and Western diplomats, comes from both guerrilla fighters and Afghans who are unassociated with the guerrillas but resent the Soviet presence.

Russians Killed in Kabul

They said many Soviet soldiers and civilians had been killed in Kabul in stabbings and other attacks, particularly in the noisy, crowded bazaar.

There have also been several terrorist bombings in or near Soviet installations, including an explosion that destroyed part of the heavily fortified Soviet Embassy last year.

Because of these incidents, Soviet troops, when not engaged in combat or on patrol, stick to their bases, Kabul residents and Western diplomats said.

Soviet civilians have been warned not to visit the bazaar. Westerners in Kabul who go there make a practice of talking loudly in English, French or German to avoid being mistaken for Russians.

Russians who shop on Chicken Street, another shopping district where Western goods and electronic equipment are plentiful, carry concealed sidearms and two-way radios, Western diplomats said.

Soviet troops armed with automatic rifles often patrol the street.

Shopper With Bodyguards

A Soviet diplomat shopping along Chicken Street on a recent afternoon was accompanied by several Soviet bodyguards and followed at a discreet distance by a heavily armed Soviet patrol.

Narcotics, easily obtained in Afghanistan, are another problem, according to Western diplomats, who said many Soviet soldiers serving in the country had developed drug problems.

One Kabul resident said there was a special drug rehabilitation clinic in the capital for Russians, but this could not be verified.

To ease the strain and isolation, Russians in Kabul can watch Soviet television. Two of the three main Soviet channels are transmitted by land line to Kabul.

An Afghan official said there were several private screening rooms where Soviet movies were shown.

Soviet Shops Well Stocked

Shops in the Soviet district, which is known as Mikrorayon, a Russian word meaning "city housing project," are stocked with familiar products, including jam, cookies, canned goods, vodka and mineral water.

The Russians also drive Soviet cars and their apartments are outfitted with refrigerators and other appliances imported from home, Afghan officials said.

The apartment complexes are smaller versions of the prefabricated high-rise buildings that ring Moscow and other Soviet cities.

Because there are not enough apartments in the Soviet district, several new communities are rising on the outskirts of Kabul.

Western diplomats said top Afghan Communist Party members and senior Government officials were also housed in the Soviet district.

When large numbers of Soviet troops and armor were deployed in Kabul two days ago, apparently because of intelligence reports of possible terrorist attacks, a Soviet tank or armored personnel carrier was stationed at almost every intersection in Mikrorayon.

Social Life Circumscribed

The social life of Russians is circumscribed, involving contact almost exclusively with Eastern bloc diplomats and the Afghan authorities, according to Afghans and Western diplomats.

"They are under orders not to have anything to do with the Western diplomatic community here," a West European diplomat said.

There is a Soviet hospital in Kabul, a compound of two-story yellow buildings protected by a high concrete wall and several units of Soviet troops.

A group of six patients, young men with crewcuts who appeared to be soldiers, could be seen resting in the yard on a recent afternoon. A few yards away, a Soviet soldier scanned the area from a tank turret.

attempt to address this issue directly by going further than he has before in acknowledging his responsibility for the clandestine Iran arms sales, White House officials said.

Reagan has insisted in two speeches that the deal was not a trade of arms for hostages, but primarily an attempt to improve relations with Iran. Since Reagan made those remarks, contrary evidence has come to light, including a Jan. 17, 1986, memorandum, on which he was given an oral briefing, that said weapons shipments may be the only way to secure release of the Americans held captive in Lebanon.

A senior adviser said Reagan has convinced himself that he did not trade arms for hostages and thinks it would be "intellectually dishonest" to abandon this view. But the draft of the speech, which the president took with him Friday to Camp David, acknowledges that "we made serious mistakes" in execution of the policy, officials said. Previously, Reagan has used the formulation that "mistakes were made," without saying who made them.

A senior adviser cautioned that Reagan might modify even this limited admission when he gives the speech. The final version is supposed to be crafted this weekend at Camp David by the president and Kenneth Khachigian, the top speechwriter for Reagan in his two successful presidential campaigns. But Reagan has been known in the past to make changes on the day he delivers a speech.

The Iran crisis has continued to preoccupy senior White House aides. When Bush delivered a speech last week saying Reagan believes he did not trade arms for hostages, some officials expressed doubts about the speech at a senior staff meeting the next morning. Chief of staff Regan then said the president believes no weapons were sold to the captors so it was not a trade. Another official responded, "That's right, Don. We didn't sell them to the captors. We sold them to their bosses."

Like the president, Regan has been isolated from reporters since November. He has refused to answer questions about his role in the

Iran initiative, and on Friday it was disclosed that Secretary of State George P. Shultz had given testimony to Congress indicating that Regan sought to conceal the Iran arms sales from him last May.

Aside from Iran, the White House has been caught in a flurry of infighting over the tone of the Tuesday address. Three camps have been seeking dominance, officials said: one led by Regan deputy Dennis Thomas, one led by speechwriting chief Anthony Dolan and the third represented by Khachigian.

The drafts are "proliferating like rabbits," said a senior White House official on Friday. "If it weren't so late in the game, it would be funny." He said most of the argument is over tone because the substantive issues have either been set or—in the case of catastrophic health insurance—will not be detailed in the address, just mentioned generally.

A White House official who favors the catastrophic health initiative acknowledged yesterday, "We have so many differences in our own ranks on this one, we really

don't have our own act together yet." But another aide said the gap had narrowed in recent days.

The Regan team plans to repeat last year's shorter version of a speech, with more emphasis on themes and less on substantive proposals. Aides describe it as a future-oriented speech, one that will focus on the broad theme of "competitiveness" and include initiatives in education, job training and a modest welfare proposal.

Wirthlin said it is "even more important than Iran" for the president to address such issues as job creation, education and the federal budget deficit. "The deficit is hanging over the nation like a Damocles sword," said Wirthlin, reflecting a common view in Congress.

One participant in the drafting described the speech as "a balance between conciliation and confrontation."

The "confrontation" part refers primarily to continued support for U.S. military aid to the contras, the rebels trying to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua. Less than one-fourth of Americans back this policy, according to the Post-ABC poll, and support had dropped since the disclo-

sure that some of the proceeds from the Iran arms sales apparently were diverted to aid the contras.

But senior advisers said that Reagan had dropped a confrontational reference to the "poisonous influence" of the Soviet Union in world affairs contained in an original draft given him by Khachigian.

"The president will say in his speech that he wants to reach out to the Soviets and reach an agreement that will reduce the nuclear arsenals of both sides, and there is no way that such provocative language will help him do that," said a participant in the drafting process.

This source said Reagan will also strike a conciliatory note in his approach to the new Democratic leaders of Congress, urging them to work with him to reduce the federal deficit and face other pressing national issues.

The various speech drafts have become a forum for competing administration voices on the direction that Reagan should take during his last two years of office. As one example, sources said that conservatives in the administration and on Capitol Hill had tried to push Reagan to endorse near-term deployment of the Strategic Defense Initiative, the missile defense plan which Reagan has described as one of his most important programs.

Conservatives favor such deployment on grounds that this would prevent Reagan from bargaining away deployment in future negotiations with the Soviet Union and that it would make it more difficult for future Congresses or presidents to kill SDI. But some supporters of antimissile research say that near-term deployment would encourage Democrats to launch an immediate assault on the entire program.

White House officials said Reagan is expected to sidestep the issue in his State of the Union message, reiterating his support for SDI without addressing the near-term deployment issue. They pointed out that Weinberger has advocated the early deployment idea without getting approval of the recuperating president or other Cabinet members who make policy.

Weinberger's statements on SDI and the White House reaction provided, once again, graphic evidence of the internal divisions that have characterized the Reagan presidency in the past, when Reagan was riding high, and confront it now again in darker times.